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Inextricably Bound: Strip Clubs, Prostitution, and Sex Trafficking

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INEXTRICABLY BOUND: STRIP CLUBS, PROSTITUTION, AND SEX TRAFFICKING

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KEYWORDS

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FOR THE LAST YEAR AND A HALF I have been a fellow and an associate at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard. I have had the opportunity to study, research, write, and speak on the issue of prostitution and its link to human sex trafficking here in the United States, as well as throughout the world. To say that it is a crime of shocking brutality and a gross violation of basic human rights is an understatement.

Today, I will be addressing a topic that is especially close to my heart: the role that members of our military play in this great evil. And let me assure you, no one loves and respects our military more than I do. I was an active duty Air Force Judge Advocate General (JAG), a prosecutor and defense attorney in the Air Force, as well as a professor at the Air Force Academy. I am also the proud father of two sons, a daughter, and a son-in-law who are all graduates of the Air Force Academy; so we are a military family.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) is very aware of its responsibility to eliminate sexual assault among its personnel and to ensure that its members do not engage in activities that support human trafficking. In 2014, they requested the RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI) initiate an independent assessment of sexual assault and sexual harassment. The survey found that approximately 20,000 military members had experienced a sexual assault in the past year.¹ The Combatting Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) program is tasked with implementing DoD's policy of opposing prostitution and any related activities contributing to

¹ Rand Corporation, RAND Military Workplace Study, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, RR-870-OSD, 2014).

the phenomenon of trafficking in persons.² CTIP has mandated “General Awareness Web-based Training” requiring annual certification that includes content on recognizing human trafficking and reporting suspected incidents.

The military should be applauded for its recognition of this problem and for taking steps to remedy it, but they can and must do more. As you have already heard today, pornography is an evil that harms all aspects of our society. We could spend days just discussing this issue, but understand this is a problem that is rampant even within the military. I am totally in agreement with NCOSE’s position that DoD should require annual training about the dangers of pornography, as well as random sweeps for pornography in the workspace and on government computers.

But another action that DoD could take that would have an immediate impact on the fight against human trafficking and on an outdated and unacceptable “boys will be boys” culture is to place strip clubs, so-called “gentleman’s clubs,” and other sexually oriented entertainment establishments off-limits to all personnel. This would send a clear and resounding message that it is not going to be business as usual any longer!

Strip clubs provide the perfect learning environment for sexually toxic attitudes and behaviors. Leering, jeering, sexual touching, and lap dancing are everyday occurrences in strip clubs throughout the world. In “VIP” rooms and back rooms, acts of prostitution, sexual assaults, and sexual trafficking are the norm.³ Military members cannot exploit and objectify women in one environment without it having an effect on other aspects of their lives, including their military service and their relationships with their sisters in arms. Additionally, strip clubs are well-known fronts enabling prostitution and sex trafficking.

Karen Hughes, who spent 35 years with the Las Vegas Police department, including eight years as the head of the LVPD Vice unit, has a lifetime of experience dealing with the reality of “gentlemen’s clubs” and strip clubs. The owners of strip clubs understand that they are in a dirty business. The men who come to the clubs don’t come for the overpriced drinks, they come for the fantasy girl and the potential for a “happy ending.” No strip club survives where the promise of sex acts in back rooms, VIP rooms, or local hotels is not realized. Strip club managers have to balance keeping alive the environment that keeps the predatory males coming back for more, while trying to give the appearance of staying within legal limits. Pimps become regular customers at strip clubs. For years, they have used the clubs to break down the inhibitions of their young girls. The use of drugs among dancers is common to numb the reality of their daily abuse. Pimps also pay off security guards and management so they can bring in their girls and recruit others. Occasionally, the management will secretly cooperate with the police and give up a “bad pimp” who has a girl working the club. This takes the club off the watch list for a period of time, while law enforcement concentrates on the other clubs in the area. This is a big money business and the balancing act is constant. In a personal interview, Ms. Hughes stated that during her entire career, none of the strip clubs were “clean.”⁴ She also reported a troubling trend of prostitution moving off the streets

² U.S. Department of Defense, “DoD Instruction 2200.01, Combatting Trafficking in Persons (CTIP)” (April, 21, 2015), <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/220001p.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2017). See paragraph 3a.

³ Karen Hughes (retired police officer), personal interview with the author, March 6, 2017.

⁴ Ibid.

into the strip clubs as pimps and members of organized crime see the layers of safety that such clubs provide.⁵ The problems for law enforcement are the lack of resources and the time required to run sting operations. Every police department has limited financial assets and must continue to train new officers that have the skills necessary to go deep into the VIP rooms; that takes large quantities of cash that few departments can spare. It is a crime that never ends.⁶

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has taken a lead role in fighting trafficking and has established task forces throughout the nation, partnering with local, state, and other federal law enforcement agencies. The warning signs of human sex trafficking include the presence of strip clubs and “streetwalkers.” The FBI has also reported that certain locations such as truck stops, massage parlors, and strip clubs are often havens for sex trafficking.⁷ An FBI task force in Portland, Oregon, a hot spot for human sex trafficking, found a huge overlap between strip clubs and the sex trade. One member of the task force stated, “It’s no secret that pimps and traffickers will go to strip clubs to try to find girls to traffic and promote or compel into prostitution.”⁸ In another investigation of four strip clubs that was led by agents of the FBI, IRS, and local police, graphic court filings detailed how in the dimly lit “VIP” rooms, dancers and patrons engaged in open sex acts for money.⁹

One fact that is indisputable is the close proximity of strip clubs to our bases throughout the world. As an example, Ft Bragg, in Fayetteville, North Carolina, is the Army’s largest base with over 50,000 troops; it has a number of strip clubs right outside the gate on Ft Bragg Street. Fayetteville, with a population of roughly 200,000, has the dubious honor of being the third ranked city per capita for strip clubs in the nation. There are 15 strip clubs to serve its relatively small population.¹⁰ The Naval Station Norfolk, which is the Navy’s largest U.S. base, and Langley Air Force Base, both located in Virginia, are separated by only 21 miles. The Marine base of Camp Lejeune is located in Jacksonville, North Carolina, a small town with a population of 69,000. A quick Google search finds five strip clubs in Jacksonville and 21 in the vicinity of Langley and the Naval Station Norfolk. Military discounts are common because it is no secret whose patronage keeps the clubs going. The bottom line is that the military’s sexual assault crisis is not occurring in a vacuum. Consumption of sexual performances and commercial sex acts at strip clubs by U.S. military personnel instill the very notions of sexual privilege and entitlement that lead to sexual assault and creates the culture that enables sex trafficking.

The infamous “juicy bars” outside the gates of our bases in South Korea offer a perfect example of what decisive action can accomplish. A few years ago, there were about 55 such establishments outside the gates of the Osan Air Base.¹¹ Young women used to stand outside the bars and ask the service members to enter and

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Amanda Walker-Rodriguez and Rodney Hill, “Human Sex Trafficking,” *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Federal Bureau of Investigation, March 2011.

⁸ *Fox 12 Oregon*, “FBI Searches Portland Strip Club in Connection with Child Sex Traffickers Investigation,” November 17, 2016.

⁹ Jim Brunner and Mike Carter, “Feds Say Prostitution Rampant at Strip Clubs,” *The Seattle Times*, June 3, 2008.

¹⁰ Zachary Crockett, “Why Does Portland Have So Many Strip Clubs,” *Priceonomics*, June 17, 2015.

¹¹ Lt. Gen. Jan-Marc Jouas, USAF, Ret., personal interview with the author, March 13, 2017.

buy highly priced non-alcoholic drinks. This started the process that often led to the purchase of sex acts. Prostitution and indentured servitude were everyday occurrences.¹² The Air Force efforts to put “juicy bars” off-limits in 2013 reduced their number of juicy bars to nine. “The whole tone outside the [Osan] gate has changed,” 7th Air Force Commander Lt. Gen. Jan-Marc Jouas said. “I’ve had many airmen that have just come out and said that in conversation. A lot of them didn’t like going outside the gate because of the seediness of the environment, and now that’s been turned around.”¹³

While South Korea illustrates a regional success, it also highlights the weakness of DoD CTIP Policy as currently written. All our military bases have an Armed Forces Disciplinary Control Board which is tasked with making establishments that present conditions which adversely affect their health, safety, welfare, morale, or morals, off-limits to military personnel.¹⁴ DoD has conducted an inquiry and several Commands reported that they have sexually oriented businesses and other related establishments off-limits as mandated.¹⁵ In my lengthy interview with Lt. Gen. Jouas, he made it abundantly clear that although he faced challenges within the military as well as from the outside, he and his outstanding staff persevered and implemented the policy because it was the right thing to do. He stated, “The military must present a consistent message to our troops and currently, we are not doing that.”¹⁶ He went on to add that making strip clubs off-limits worldwide is a decision that would help change the culture of “boys being boys” that has no place in our military.

The reality is that the Armed Forces Disciplinary Control Board process is totally inadequate to address the full scope of these issues because:

- it applies to business within a limited local area (even “regional” boards have limited reach);
- procedural process is time and labor intensive (e.g., written notification and hearing for each business, appeal process locally and to next higher commander);
- it was designed to deal with only one business at a time, not a “class” of businesses;
- different commanders in different locations may yield inconsistent results, leading to confusion for service members who must comply with DoD’s regulation; and,
- installation level commanders already have too many responsibilities and should not be burdened with policing sexually oriented and adult entertainment establishments.

Recommendations:

- 1) Amend DoD CTIP policy to place strip clubs, sexually oriented businesses, and adult entertainment establishments off-limits worldwide.
- 2) Enforce the Military Honor and Decency Act of 1996 by requiring the U.S. Navy to stop selling pornography in Navy exchanges.

¹² Ashly Rowland and Yoo Kyong Chang, “Air Force Crackdown on ‘Juicy Bars’ in South Korea Paying Dividends,” *Stars and Stripes*, July 6, 2014.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Armed Forces Disciplinary Control Boards and Off-Installation Liaison and Operations, 32 C.F.R. § 631.111 (a).

¹⁵ William H. Booth, Defense Human Resources Activity Director, letter to National Center on Sexual Exploitation, December 8, 2016.

¹⁶ Lt. Gen. Jouas, personal interview, *ibid.*

- 3) Amend DoD CTIP policy to require annual training about the harms of pornography consumption.
- 4) Vigorously enforce DoD policy of conducting random sweeps for pornography on government-issued computers and Internet-capable devices in the workspace, and submit annual reports to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives Armed Service Committees.

Our military is the most highly respected institution in America. Yet, the last couple of weeks have seen the explosion of a horrendous cyber-based sexual abuse scandal involving senior Navy officers and the Marines and more than 30,000 service people. The situation appears to have also involved other branches. Now is the time for decisive action. We don't need more studies that tell us what we already know. There is a crisis in our military that leads to the objectification of women, harassment, and sexual assault. The patronage of strip clubs is where prostitution and sex trafficking flourish. In regard to sex trafficking at strip clubs, the FBI has reported it, national and local law enforcement agencies have reported it, and the media has reported it. Now is the time for the military to lead and make sure that strip clubs and "gentleman's clubs" are no longer a part of its culture.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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Dan O'Bryant is an advocate in the battle against human sex trafficking. He was a 2015–16 Fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University, where he gave presentations and did research on the topic, with publication pending. He served as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Shared Hope International from 2013–2016, and remains on the Board. Holding a Juris Doctor degree from Drake University, he served as a Judge Advocate General (JAG) in the United States Air Force, serving as a prosecutor then later as an Area Defense Counsel. He was also a law professor at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. In 2003–2004 O'Bryant was a candidate for the U.S. Senate from Colorado. Most recently, from 2004 to 2013, he served as one of three principals in The Eickmann

Group, a defense consulting firm. He has served on numerous not-for-profit boards throughout his career. O'Bryant returned to Harvard for the Fall Term 2016 as an Associate at the Weatherhead Center, continuing research and speaking on various issues of sexual exploitation. O'Bryant lives in Colorado Springs with his wife of 40 years, Donna. They have three children, and eight grandchildren.

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